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SUBJECT: MACEDONIA COMMITTED TO STAYING THE COURSE IN IRAQ

USG INTERAGENCY DELEGATION ON IRAQ VISITS SKOPJE

11. (U) NEA DAS Butler, together with OSD and JCS representatives, was in Skopje July 15-16 to thank the GOM for its troop contributions to missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. DATT and POLOFF (notetaker) accompanied the delegation. DAS Butler thanked GOM officials for their strong support for coalition operations, urged them to stay the course in Iraq, and explored other potential tasks for Macedonia. He also briefed them on ongoing operations in Iraq.

UNWAVERING SUPPORT FROM EXECUTIVE BRANCH, PARLIAMENT

12. (SBU) GOM interlocutors, including FM Milososki and MOD Elenovski, expressed the GOM's unwavering support for coalition efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan. (NOTE: The Army of the Republic of Macedonia (ARM) has contributed troops to Iraq and Afghanistan since 2003, and currently contributes 40 troops to coalition operations in Iraq and 130 troops to NATO's ISAF mission in Afghanistan. Troop deployments require parliamentary approval, which has been unanimous in every case. END NOTE.) MP Vladimir Gjorcev, Chair of the Parliamentary Committee on Defense and Security, and MP Ruzhdi Matoshi, Deputy Chair of the Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Policy, pledged parliamentary support for the current number of Macedonian troops serving in operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Gjorcev noted the ARM's ethnically diverse and multi-confessional characteristics, which he said reflected the effective functioning of Macedonia's multi-ethnic state.

13. (U) In addition to official meetings, the USG delegation members met in an informal setting with more than twenty ARM officers and NCOs who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan. The officers and NCOs shared with DAS Butler and other members of the delegation their personal experiences from serving in Iraq and Afghanistan, providing a first-hand look at the challenges of serving alongside U.S. troops in those operations.

PROMOTING INTEROPERABILITY FOR NATO CANDIDACY

14. (SBU) DAS Butler stressed that, although Macedonia contributes only a relatively small number of troops to coalition operations, their presence in Iraq is vital because they operate as a deployable unit. That allows the ARM soldiers to showcase their capabilities and their

inter-operability with U.S. and NATO troops. CHOD LTG Stojanovski noted that the readiness of ARM troops to deploy and operate alongside international forces has been achieved because of significant reforms implemented within the ARM and Ministry of Defense (MOD) in recent years. Although GOM interlocutors said that ARM troop contributions abroad will continue at the current level, they noted that the number of troops deployed has reached the maximum level possible. In discussions on possible future tasks, as events develop, they stressed that additional deployments would negatively impact ongoing domestic reform efforts. (NOTE: In addition to Iraq and Afghanistan, the ARM contributes 20 troops to EUFOR in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and 2 soldiers to UNIFIL in Lebanon -- with overall deployments constituting approximately 3% of the total number of ARM forces. END NOTE)

MILOVANOVIC